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Emma Davidson

Social justice or social control? An ethnographic study of detached youth work in Scotland

Abstract

This article examines the experiences of a newly formed detached youth work project in Scotland and its relationship to neo-liberal ideology. The growth of neo-liberalism has, as with other social professions, made detached youth work vulnerable to a deficit-based approach. This has come hand-in-hand with managerial practices focused on efficient, targeted interventions delivered through short term budgets. The article, drawing on ethnographic data, describe a team of youth workers challenged with reconciling their deep commitment to delivering a programme of relational youth work with the targeted focus of the project on 'risky' youth and associated local apparatus of community safety. Throughout youth work's history the dividing line between youth work and mechanisms of social control has been slippery to navigate. The article argues that emergent neo-liberal ideology presents a further professional challenge to youth work. In the context of austerity and a widening neo-liberal policy agenda from Westminster, Scottish youth workers are being required to work harder to demonstrate that the service is not simply there to target 'risky' social groups or 'plug the gaps' that the state can no longer provide. Youth workers, in this context, must continue to make the case in defence of well-resourced, universal youth work and its potential to contribute to tackling social injustice and inequality.

Key words: youth work, community safety, antisocial behaviour, neo-liberalism, austerity

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Introduction

Detached youth work across the UK has a varied history. While it has long been associated with the engagement of 'unattached' young people and their (mis)behaviour (Morse, 1965, Platt, 1969, Crimmens et al., 2004), since the 1990s detached youth work has become increasingly associated with tackling youth related antisocial behaviour. This shift is intimately connected to the contemporary political, policy and social framework within which youth work services have come to operate. On one hand, this has involved growing political attention to the 'community safety' agenda, which has helped draw youth work services into multi-agency approaches to crime prevention and public protection (Hughes et al., 2002, Measor and Squires, 2000). On the other, is the context of neo-liberal bureaucracy, managerialism and growing pressure to deliver targeted youth interventions within ever declining and frequently short term budgets (Davies and Merton, 2009, Kelly and Armitage, 2014, de St Croix, 2019).

These discourses fit uncomfortably with what might be seen as a 'purist' approach to detached youth work, which emphasises social justice over social control, and young people's rights over responsabilisation (Prince's Trust Scotland, 2000, Federation For Detached Youth Work, 2007, Rogers, 2011,). Detached practitioners give significant weight to building trust with young people and engaging with them voluntarily 'where they are at' and on issues of their choosing (Kaufman, 2001). This ability to work flexibly with, not on, young people is core. The concern is how such an approach to practice can be achieved in a context where project objectives are becoming more explicitly aligned to mechanisms of control, surveillance and managerialism.

Arguably, Scottish youth work practice has been less vulnerable to the processes of neoliberalism given both the rhetoric and policy objectives of the continued SNP administration. These emphasise a national distinctiveness focused on welfarism and social justice, values especially significant in the Scottish youth justice model. As Coburn and Gormally (2019:19) note, Scotland has also had a distinct historical context which has meant that youth work has been characterised by less reliance on state funding and greater coherence between the statutory, voluntary and community sector.

Based on a 14-month period of ethnographic fieldwork within a detached youth work project in its first few years of operation, the article considers the tensions introduced by neo-liberal ideology and their effect on detached youth work practice within the project, 'Youth Beat'. To do this it focuses on the micro interactions taking place between youth workers, social control professionals and young people and the ways in which the competing discourses of neo-liberalism ideology and critical youth work are played out 'on the street'. The impact that locally based ideas (and ideals) of organisational

boundaries are also examined in relation to youth people's own perceptions and interactions with the project. It is suggested that while detached youth work (and youth work more broadly) offers new possibilities for how youth justice objectives are met in Scotland, inculcating detached services into the widening net of neo-liberal social control can negatively impact on the quality of services and on how they are perceived and experienced by young people.

Youth work, community safety and the 'problem' of youth

The harnessing of youth work to deliver community safety objectives has been a recurring theme within contemporary social policy across the UK. The stimulus came in the form of the Morgan Report (1991), a Home Office commissioned report on crime prevention. It favoured 'community safety' and local control as a means of enabling a shift away from crime prevention as the 'sole responsibility' of the police (Home Office, 1991 para 3.6). The report, in turn, supported a holistic approach to delivering crime prevention based on locally delivered, multi-agency partnerships (Stenson and Edwards, 2004). Alongside youth work, services including education, health and employment were noted as being key partners within this new service rhetoric.

While the Morgan Report was not aligned with the Conservative administrations ideological position, its key focus (that local problems necessitate local solutions) were swiftly taken up by the Labour party (Muncie, 1999). By 1997, the term 'community safety' had a core place on the political agenda in Scotland. This policy focus was accompanied by funding secured from the (as was) Scottish Executive for a National Community Safety Advisor whose role was to work with local authorities and their partners to develop a new partnership model. This was followed the year after when the Scottish Executive, COSLA and the Association of Chief Police Officers Scotland (ACPOS) agreed on an approach to develop community safety, published in the document *Safer Communities Through Partnerships – A Strategy for Action* (Scottish Community Network, 2012:2).

As highlighted by Crawford, (2009:71) the community safety paradigm that emerged at this time provided a foundation upon which the New Labour government could assert its 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' ideology. Through community safety New Labour was able to conceptualise crime as the product of multiple social problems, with the ensuing policies being underpinned by communitarian principles of mutual obligation, individual responsibility and respect (Crawford, 2009:71, Etzioni, 1996). At the same time this prompted a conceptual shift away from stand-alone public services, such as the police, housing and social work, towards forms of governance which encapsulate broader social outcomes, of which 'community safety' is an example (Prior, 2007:2, McAra, 2008).

Critics have responded by arguing that rather than being a socially progressive approach to crime control, community safety is part of a wider 'revanchist' policy (Crawford, 2009:71) capable of 'selective problem construction', 'deviancy amplification' and 'social control' (Squires 1997:1). Arguably in Scotland, the discursive framework surrounding community safety has a 'stronger imprint of social welfare values' and thus speaks more to the values of social justice than has been the case in England and Wales (Henry, 2009:106). The term, nonetheless, has shaped the direction of Scottish policy, by encouraging the dispersal of discipline from state to social institutions and local networks and reshaping the boundaries between social control and social welfare (for an example see Casey and Flint, 2008)

Through this lens, control of deviancy no longer operates as a separate system but penetrates young people's family, school and neighbourhood (Brown, 2004). At the same time, the negative contributions of young people, such as crime, disaffection in education and antisocial behaviour, have driven policy discussion (France et al., 2007). The outcome was a proliferation in new services and institutions dedicated to the goals of youth justice, crime and community safety (Factor and Pitts, 2001, McVie, 2011, Fyfe and Moir, 2013). Likewise, the 'antisocial behaviour industry' (Pitts, 2005) that emerged at this time not only shaped funding streams but also formed a new institutional infrastructure. Pre-existing practices became appropriated within this, resulting in agencies normally associated with young people's leisure or education, such as youth work, being inculcated into the governance of the antisocial. This shift means that programmes highlighting the 'riskiness' of participants are favoured within funding streams, while 'negative representations of the risk posed by young people' are strengthened and interventions based on these identifications are mobilised (Kelly, 2001:24, Kelly, 2012:101). According to Hill and Wright (2003:282), this has not only resulted in young people being perceived as a threat to community safety, but simultaneously positions them outside the community being conceptualised.

An associated aspect of community safety discourse has been what McLaughlin et al (2001:301) refer to as 'modernization through managerialization'. This has involved a shift towards evidence-based approaches. This comes with a respective move away from universal services, towards targeted provision which can better articulate measurable and quantifiable indicators, outputs and outcomes (Davies and Merton, 2009, Kelly and Armitage, 2014, de St Croix, 2019). In their evidence review on the development of youth work in Europe, the European Commission (2014:70) also noted the move towards targeted, individual provision. Financial cuts following the 2008 recession have augmented this process, with projects working with young people and families in Scotland continuing to voice concerns about shrinking public sector budgets and the direct and knock on effect of local authority

cuts to voluntary organisations (MacKinnon, 2019). Davies (2013:8) has also pointed to the escalating funding pressures on youth services and, as a consequence, the growing focus on preventative or intensive approaches aimed at risky or at risk groups 'pre-labelled by their deficits'.

While the political landscape has changed considerably in the last two decades and there is notable divergence across the UK (Muncie, 2011, Mooney et al., 2014), youth work provision targeting 'risky' groups or issues has been sustained. In the aftermath of the English Riots in 2011, for example, youth workers were highlighted as being central to preventing youth crime and violence, with recommendations including placing youth workers in accident and emergency departments to identify young people 'at risk' of serious violence (HM Government, 2011:9). Within Scotland, initiatives such as 'Cash for Communities' and 'No Knives Better Lives' exemplify the desire to use youth work (and its workers) to support and divert young people 'at risk' of turning to crime and anti-social behaviour as a way of life.

An uneasy coupling? Detached youth work and social control

Inherent tensions, therefore, exist between the positioning of modern youth work in policy discourse and the values and ethos underpinning youth work practice and theory (Jeffs and Smith, 2008). Practice can be summarised as a voluntary relationship which starts with a young person's 'view of the world' (see for example National Youth Agency, 2006, Prince's Trust Scotland, 2000). The theoretical importance of this approach relates to the status it affords young people, since power between young person and worker is shared and the interaction is conceptualised as equal (Ingram and Harris, 2005:15). This allows young people to become active participants within a service rather than passive recipients of it (Wood and Hine, 2009). It is on this basis that a youth worker's relationship with a young person can be differentiated from those with other 'significant' adults, such as teachers, social workers and police officers where it may be more hierarchical (McGregor and Mills, 2011), bureaucratic (Adley and Jupp Kina, 2015) and potentially antagonistic (Kennelly, 2011, Sadler, 2008).

It is within the context of detached youth work practice that, arguably, these notions of adult power and authority come into sharper focus. The approach is distinctive given its location *outside* the traditional youth centre, functioning instead from places young people have chosen to occupy. Typically, these might include street corners, shopping centres, cafes, libraries, green spaces or even the young person's own home. Proponents of this approach celebrate the flexibility and responsiveness that comes from this way of working. Rather than seeking a pre-determined outcome (such as reduced crime) or imposing a pre-conceived programme, the youth worker can begin 'from where young people are in terms of their values, attitudes, issues and ambitions' (Prince's Trust

Scotland, 2000). Engagements with young people are thus free to take different forms; each adapting to the social circumstances and needs of those encountered during a session. Detached youth work is therefore characterised by its participatory and empowering credentials. It engages with young people voluntarily, but critically does so in *their* spaces and at times of *their* choosing. Conceptualised as a rights based practice, it does not impose an agenda upon young people, but rather allows interactions to be led by young people themselves. The concept of negotiation is therefore central, with the worker acting as 'an agent of social change and social action, rather than social control' (Federation For Detached Youth Work, 2007).

While the contemporary context within which detached youth work operates has heightened tension between its role in social change and its role in social control, it is important to recognise that this dilemma is not historically unique. Detached work has its origins in the philanthropic activities of the nineteenth century where young people, particularly those in an urban setting, were seen as being inadequately controlled and in need of protection (Kaufman, 2001, Platt, 1969). Such work was moralistic and based on a notion that unruly young people - especially those on the streets - could be redeemed through education, discipline and control. Meanwhile, in the 1960s the Albemarle report (Ministry of Education, 1960) on the contribution of youth services helped renew societal concerns about the number of 'unattached', 'at risk' youths and new 'teenage' cultures (Jeffs and Smith, 1988). While the report had no direct mandate in Scotland it undeniably left a legacy for Scottish youth work. Youth workers were given a new profession position and Scottish youth work enjoyed the benefits of shifting to person-centred practice. This shift also underlined the inextricable link - and blurred boundaries - between youth work as social education, as social welfare, and as a mechanism of control and containment (Hall et al., 1999, Smith & Doyle, 2002).

This raises deep seated questions about the nature of youth work. Skott-Myhre (2006) has suggested that work with young people is premised on an adult-child binary, where the young person is fundamentally in deficit to adults. This, suggests Spence (2004), can explain why in the dominant conceptualisation of young people participating in youth work is in terms of what they are or could become, rather than what they are now in the present. They are, in other words, regarded as becoming rather than being (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). In this context, youth work has an inevitable connection to young people's misbehaviour, since it is this that needs to be managed so as to ensure the young person becomes an adult with respect for authority and community norms. Jeffs (2001:155) argues that there is an 'enduring *raison d'être*' for interventions that tackle antisocial behaviour since they simultaneously serve the interests of young people and the community. What

youth workers are left with are divergent conceptualisations of youth within which their professional identities must be balanced.

A number of commentators have emphasised the particular impact that contemporary neo-liberalism has had on youth work practice. For Fyfe and Moir (2013), resource-driven intervention has been central to the deficit discourse focused on apportioning blame onto young people. This, they suggest, has resulted in a further marginalisation of structural factors such as poverty and community fragmentation. Similarly, Bradford and Cullen (2014) argue that contemporary neo-liberalism has subjected youth work to a range of managerialist practices that have further exposed its ambiguity as a profession. Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo's (2013:1698) work on developing a model of critical youth work concur, concluding that neo-liberal ideology is now the greatest challenge to successful youth work. Defending a distinct Scottish approach has been challenging in this context, a challenge even more stark given relentless pressures on local government budgets and the lack of parity between youth work service delivery and funding (Davidson, 2019).

The study

This article is based on a 14-month ethnography of young people's definitions and experiences of antisocial behaviour. The study aimed to explore young people's understandings of the 'antisocial', both as a concept and as a policy tool and, in particular, connect ideas of 'antisocial youth' to the spatial context in which it takes place. To do so, the study looked to understand the ways in which spaces and places are (re)appropriated and negotiated by young people using ethnography as a medium for observing and listening to their personal narratives.

The fieldwork was based in Robbiestoun (a pseudonym), a large housing estate on the outskirts of a Scottish city. Predominantly social housing, the area had significant concentrations of deprivation, with some parts ranked as the most deprived five per cent in Scotland. Unemployment was higher than the City average, as was overcrowding and households without central heating. This wider socio-economic profile was reflected in the lives of the young people participating in the research. The area also suffered from relatively high levels of crime and disorder, although perhaps more pertinent was the area's apparent reputation as being a 'bad place to live', a perspective fuelled by several high profile incidents involving local drug dealers in the early 2000s. Although the area has improved greatly and housing popular, community safety professionals continue to describe it as a 'hot spot' for antisocial behaviour across the city, with young people being identified as one of its main sources.

The research fieldwork involved participant observation within Robbiestoun youth club and its newly created detached project, referred to here by its pseudonym, 'Youth Beat'. It is the latter that is the concern of this paper and focuses on the first two years of the projects operation. Youth Beat employed approximately eight members of staff and in teams of two or three covered the streets and parks across Robbiestoun. Sessions normally took place on Saturday nights and, on occasion, additional sessions were provided during holidays or as special events. The majority of detached youth workers were sessional and most were involved in other centre-based sessions. Many were local residents or had worked in the local area for many years and as such had a strong working knowledge of Robbiestoun and existing relationships with its young residents.

Young people were advised, wherever possible, about my role as researcher and the purpose of my presence. However, this was not always possible – for example, where it was judged that the intervention would interrupt or negatively affect the 'natural' encounter. To ensure the confidentiality of those involved some elements of the data have been changed. Care has been taken to ensure these alterations do not affect meaning. Fieldnotes and informal conversations with practitioners and young people were all written up immediately after each session. Photos were also frequently taken as a record of sessions and, in some cases, young people participated in this activity. Several local strategy meetings were also observed. All types of data were analysed thematically in Nvivo, with particular attention given to the multiple perspectives within.

Youth Beat: The strategic context

As a starting point, it is useful to position *Youth Beat* in the context described in the introductory sections. The project was designed as an intervention targeted at a pre-identified 'high risk' group – young street drinkers. This focus was driven by the availability of funding, the majority of which was sourced from an alcohol and drugs agency, while smaller amounts were provided by corporate sponsors and local funding bodies. Using a harm reduction approach, the focus of the project was on the 'unattached' youth; that is young people not actively engaging with other services in the area, thus providing them with an outlet for advice and assistance that otherwise would not be available. The role of the detached worker was therefore described as a provider of advice, information and a point through which a young person could access other specialist services.

While the service centred on alcohol misuse, the project plan made explicit reference to the association between the target group and their involvement in 'associated risky behaviour', including antisocial behaviour. The project's role in tackling 'antisocial youth' was also acknowledged by community safety professionals in the area. A regular report was circulated to local partners, including

the Council's community safety team, police, youth workers and children's services, on the activities undertaken by the project team. A verbal report was also provided to partners at a monthly community safety strategy meeting. Implicit within this meeting was the assumption that partners had a common vision of the project aims (community safety and the reduction of antisocial behaviour) and that information should be shared to enable change. A key component of this multi-agency forum was in bringing the principles of crime prevention, children's welfare and children's rights together for the wider benefit of the community.

The project was also subject to multiple formal reporting requirements by its different funders. These established a range of outcome based measures upon which the progress of the project was monitored. Examples of indicators included the number and frequency of sessions, the number of new and repeat contacts and reductions in crime. Indicators were also developed in relation to attitudinal and behavioural change in young people's relationship to alcohol (such as increased confidence, greater use of alternative services and increased understanding of risk). Data were recorded in evaluation sheets completed at the end of each session or provided by local partners (such as the police), although compilation was complicated by the fact that different funders required different monitoring information. These multiple monitoring systems were a requirement of project funding, yet posed a significant administrative and managerial burden.

This context places Youth Beat in what is a fairly typical scenario for third sector projects at the time, being time limited in terms of funding, problem orientated and target led. The service was directed by dominant national policy objectives relating to alcohol misuse and antisocial behaviour which, in turn, pre-determined both the project aim and the client group. While the harm reduction focus of the project emphasised the agency of the young people and active engagement on their terms, the language of the monitoring framework and associated outcomes had the effect of aligning the project to neo-liberal rationalities favouring managerialism, targets and pre-defined impact (de St Croix, 2017). The emphasis on partnership working, which was part of the original project brief, resulted in its prompt instillation into the local community safety machinery. The Youth Beat team recognised the project objectives and the associated requirements. Nonetheless, staff were clear that the project should, within this, adopt the values of person-centred youth work practice:

We have got this focus on alcohol, and that is important. There is definitely a need for it, we know that. But we still want young people to feel like this service is for them and that they can come to us about anything at all. (Project Manager)

Aye, it's about alcohol, but that is not going to stop me talking to young people about anything they want to say. That is not what it is all about. (Bobby, Detached youth worker)

Youth workers expressed a clear commitment to working flexibly with (not on) young people, to building relationships steadily, and doing this within a milieu of trust and mutual respect. The question for the service was whether such an allegiance was, in practice, achievable.

Policing or empowering?: Navigating the divide

From the outset, the youth workers emphasised the importance of a project identity distinct from what were seen to be the more punitive practices of community safety professionals (this included local police, antisocial behaviour officers and community wardens). One of the ways this was revealed was in respect to the Youth Beat uniform. It had been agreed that the project would provide waterproof clothing for staff. However, the green jackets provided were similar to those worn by local community wardens, and youth workers were concerned that the jackets would not only confuse the services, but prevent young people's engagement. The jackets became an ongoing source of debate, with the project manager emphasising their role in constructing a project 'identity'. Several workers, meanwhile, argued that the brightly coloured jackets created an official identity not in tune with the flexible and participatory image they hoped to construct:

I would prefer, like a bag or something, or even a logo that you can stick on your own jacket. That way you are gonna just look normal and fit in eh. At the moment, you are walking towards a group of young people and they are like, *bolt!* (Bobby, Detached Youth Worker)

Over time, debate about the jackets quietened, and they did slowly come to be associated with the project workers (albeit sometimes as a source of 'banter' amongst young people). The multiple discussions provoked did, however, highlight the extent to which workers wanted to separate their practice from that of community safety professionals. During sessions, this desire for separation extended to maintaining physical distance from the police. While youth workers generally did not avoid police officers, most would deliberately limit the amount of time they spent talking to them, especially in the presence of young people. There were examples of positive collaborative working with the local police, such as providing and setting up a mobile basketball pitch, but these were carefully negotiated as demonstrated in this fieldnote extract:

Fieldnotes, Youth Beat Session: The Police arrive at 7pm with the basketball pitch. It is all set up. The youth workers are hoping the police will leave before any young people arrive. A call

comes in on the police radio. It is a complaint about a group of young people at the car park [we passed a group in this location 5 mins previously]. The police tell us they have to leave. Alex [youth worker] says he is glad they are leaving. He doesn't feel it works being seen so close to the police and that it will put young people off engaging [...]

Later a group of young people come and join us. It is the group who were subject to the earlier complaint. Adam [young person] tells me that they were moved on by the police. They took their names; then moved them on. He says that this is a fairly common occurrence. He thinks that it is partly because they know his face since he is from [the most deprived part of Robbiestoun]. He is angry - he believes that he is unfairly victimised by the Police and implies that residents report young people unfairly.

This experience clearly had a significant impact on Adam, being as he described subject to a process of labelling in which he had been constructed as one of the 'usual suspects' (McAra and McVie, 2005, Gormally, 2014). Narratives, such as Adam's, and observations of young people's antagonistic interactions with the police, led some youth workers to question the value of engaging with community safety professionals. It was acknowledged that their counterparts within community safety had a role to play in tackling youth-related antisocial behaviour. However, their priorities and 'vision' of how to achieve this was different from their own:

Well both our jobs are, I guess so, are to keep them [young people] out of trouble. But we are doing it for different reasons I guess. I could tell the police [about a stone throwing incident we just witnessed] but really, what would that do but get them more into trouble. I don't want that. (Tommy, Youth Worker)

For others, past experiences with the local police had not only strengthened their commitment to traditional youth work values, but also widened the perceived divide with the community safety agenda:

Bebe tells me a story about the previous week at the youth club. Her and another worker had called the police because a group got angry and wouldn't leave. They were asked several times and at that point the workers became worried that the boys would become violent against the girls. Eventually they decided to call the police. Bebe was disappointed with the response, which was 'well we can charge them with assault and breach of the peace'. The workers were saying 'no, no, we just want you to help move them on, not charge them'. In the end two lads were charged [...]

Bebe argues that this reflects the usual response of the Police. She says that the relationship between them [youth workers] and the police is poor. They do not provide any info about young people who have been charged, there is no consideration of the fact that youth workers [like her] could help support the plan. (Bebe, Detached Youth Worker)

Part of the difficulty for workers was agreeing what circumstances did require police involvement and the implications this might have. In one session, two large groups of young people were encountered 'squaring' up in a local park. There was concern that weapons were present and the atmosphere was becoming increasingly tense. After several attempts at intervention and significant debate between the youth workers, a decision was made to contact the police. Notably, this contact was made anonymously from a neighbouring street so as to ensure no young person saw the youth worker in the role of 'informer'. In a similar incident, a group of young people were witnessed throwing large stones at the window of a local resident. One of the young people involved was known to be involved in crime and disorder, and had been working with the youth club in one-to-one support sessions:

Fieldnotes, Youth Beat session: There is a debate between the workers over whether to have the police in or not. The workers agree that the youth work role has to end somewhere and there is only so much you can do. Jan notes, 'sometimes it feels like you are getting through to him, but then he just kicks off again'.

The workers reckon that the police just don't know how to make young people scared – so what is the point? But there is also a feeling that young people don't understand consequences of their actions. Do you have contact with the parents I ask? We don't really want to says the worker, they think we are social workers.

Tommy, Bebe and Jan were all concerned that a young person, or someone around them, could be physically hurt. Yet, they also all recognised the potential harm that might come from police contact, particularly in instances when young people were already 'well known'. Adversarial contact with community safety professionals was not only futile ('what is the point?'), but was acknowledged as having a role in constructing and reinforcing an 'antisocial identity' for young people. This, in turn, may push the young person or group further into the youth justice system, reproducing the very behaviour the intervention is seeking to tackle (McAra and McVie, 2005:29). More broadly, this could further marginalise young people already judged 'at risk', and negatively impact the social relationships Youth Beat were keen to establish.

Relationships matter

This concept of 'relationship' was dominant and defined the Youth Beat approach. It was at the heart of their practice:

Relationship is the most important aspect of Youth Beat. Without it we can't do anything.
(Project Manager)

One worker referred to the Youth Centre as a 'crutch', arguing that it is possible for staff to 'fall back' on activities such as pool and computers when the session is not going as planned when working in a building. Within a detached setting, youth workers were entering young people's physical and social territories and, for the most part, were doing this uninvited. Without any 'crutches' for support, it was critical for detached workers to have the ability to engage positively with young people from the outset. While the staff team was highly skilled, it was not uncommon for initial interactions with young people to be, at the very least, suspicious, and at worst, hostile. This reaction was often a consequence of young people, especially new contacts, misidentifying workers as the police (or as in one instance 'the god squad'). As in the example below, time was often first spent reassuring young people that their role and purpose was separate from the police and associated community safety professionals:

Young person: Are you the police?

Worker 1: Don't worry – we are not the police.

Worker 2: We are different from the police (Fieldnotes, Youth Beat session).

Here, we again see the Youth Workers emphasising that the Youth Beat workers are separate from the Police. What is interesting is the claim to difference made by the second worker, a claim that was often combined with efforts to emphasise the unique nature of the detached worker-young person relationship:

Fieldnotes, Youth Beat Session: One member of the group is quick to question us: 'will I go away and write it [our conversation] up in a report?'. At this point he is not aware of me being a researcher; and he has assumed that we are police officers or connected to the Police. It takes a while for the youth worker to convince him that we are a 'friend', 'on his side' and 'not the police'.

What was striking about this interaction was the workers use of words. Notions of 'friendship' and 'standing by someone' are signifiers of a close relationship, yet during this encounter they were offered to a stranger. While detached youth workers were keen to emphasise this 'special' relationship, the question of whether such promises can go unbroken are problematic. It also implies that the police are the enemy and working 'against' young people. This tension was exemplified during one incident where a group of young people were found to be carrying a weapon with, what the youth worker believed, was intent to hurt another young person. The police were called and at least one member of the group was charged. This incident prompted significant debate amongst the team. Some workers commented that 'the youth work role has to stop somewhere'. Potential, but serious harm, to another young person justified the action taken. Others vehemently disagreed, arguing that the action of the worker had 'impacted on entire project and impacted on work we are doing'. It is impossible, in this instance, to judge who is right or wrong, since the decision is so tightly bound up in the social and cultural context in which it took place. Nonetheless, the action did have repercussions. I met the young people in question the following week:

Fieldnotes: [initially the group refuse to talk to me claimed that I would go and talk to the police] You know they [youth workers] went and called the police!!! [they tell the full story]. So what happened?, I ask. 'They charged us, THAT is what happened. And who do you think called the police. Tommy of course. Aye, He is meant to be keeping us out of jail not pitting us in. Dinnae grass that is it, dinnae grass. You should not grass'.

Young people are clearly expressing their perspective on what the 'correct' youth worker role should be. It should be to protect them from the police, and importantly, be with them, not against them. Young people are also alluding to the powerful hierarchies operating in the area and conceptualising youth workers as on 'their side'. By 'grassing' youth workers are revealing their problematic positioning within the estate's culture and social context and the tenuous boundaries between care and control (see also Evans et al., 1996, Yates, 2006 on 'grassing')

While youth workers made effort to navigate relationships within a terrain of social control, they also had to concurrently manage the processes of managerialism and target setting. While workers made claims to an approach that was open and inclusive, this had to be exercised within a pre-determined client group and a pre-ordained definition of need. At times this made workers uncomfortable, since they felt it provoked and directed conversations in ways that otherwise would not have occurred, limiting their capacity to determine actual needs or negotiate priorities in partnership with young

people. The quantitative targets also had a bearing on evaluation since typically a 'good' session came to be associated with one that involved contact with several groups of young people:

We have all the targets and all that, and I think that is good we need that. But it is also really flawed and that is what causes tensions. You know you can say oh we have this many young people, but actually they are all the same young people. How to challenge it, I'm not sure.
(Peanut, Youth worker)

In the same vein, workers expressed their frustration about feeling that they had to 'chase young people' or approach groups who were 'not doing anything and wanted to be left alone'. Youth workers questioned the impact their physical presence had, particularly given the highly visible forms of surveillance already operating across public spaces. CCTV, police patrols, community wardens and environmental crime prevention measures all contributed to a moral geography of social control (Aitken, 2001) and despite their claims to difference Youth Beat had a key place in this. In line with Kelly's (2012:110-112) analysis of diversionary activities, it could be argued that the very present of Youth Beat gave legitimacy to discourses of demonisation associated to Robbiestoun and the young people herein, perpetuating its image as an antisocial place in need of interventions aimed at containing, controlling and normalising behaviour.

Bad behaviour and young people's identity

Notably, youth workers practice was found to be influenced by the institutional process of identifying and labelling young people according to their perceived 'riskiness'. There were examples of youth workers taking decisions about which groups to engage on the basis of their perceived 'fit' with the project aims. There were also occasions where youth workers chose to dedicate more time to a group considered in 'greater' need of support. Part of the decision for intervention was influenced, it appeared, by the geographical space young people were occupying. Thus, spaces of potential conflict (such as common stairwells or the local shopping centre) or potential harm (such as hidden underpasses) were targeted. While such judgements were, of course, made in the wider social and cultural context of Robbiestoun, it does identify the potentially distorting effect of pre-identifying certain individuals or groups as suitable or urgent cases for intervention. Youth workers were also found, in some instances, to rehearse stereotypical conceptualisations of young people in their own practice:

Fieldnotes, Youth Beat Session: The youth workers have heard that the tables and decorations for the community fete will be locked in the shopping centre overnight. They are sceptical and

expect the equipment to get stolen. I tell them that they will lock the centre so it will be okay [the centre has heavy metal doors]. One replies, 'oh, them [the young people]! Oh, they can get through any door if they put their minds to it. I tell you, it'll be wrecked by the morning'. The rest laugh.

Here, the workers are discussing a group of young people generally considered by community safety professionals as the most troublesome in the area and are, themselves, perpetuating this antisocial label. Conversely, another group of males who we frequently saw were classed by workers as 'good boys'. This group spent more time indoors, and were generally encountered not 'hanging out', but moving between spaces:

Fieldnotes, Youth Beat Session: Oh, [pointing to the group walking past] they are good boys, we don't need to worry about them. It is good to have a chat with them but they are not really what we are about. (Tommy, Youth Worker)

Here we can see that a clear decision about who the project should intervene or engage with has already been made. This removes the possibility for the service to be entirely led by service users and worryingly, the possibility of engaging with young people who may need help but do not spend time on the street. The implication is that if you are not 'hanging about' you are not a problem.

Notably, young people themselves were found to be influenced by the assumed status of the young people at whom the project was targeted. This was demonstrated during various encounters where young people would, in response to our approach, align their own identity to the angel / devil binary (Holloway and Valentine, 2000):

We ask what have you been up to ... He replies: 'staying out of trouble'

When we ask them what they were doing for the rest of the evening they all laugh and shout, 'ah we are gonna smoke weed'.

We are the good guys; we don't drink and cause trouble like the rest. We don't need you!

We approach a group of young males. Daryl quickly jokes that he smokes crack and he needs my help.

Various fieldnotes, Youth Beat Session

In these examples young people are shown to be deliberately inflating the image of the 'antisocial youth' or, conversely, downplaying its significance. Regardless of how they chose to position themselves, what is clear is that they understood the project as encompassing an agenda that was interested in their behaviour, and its care and control.

Conclusion: A conflict that can ever be resolved?

The empirical data presented highlights the challenges faced by detached youth workers as they tread the boundary between social justice and social control. Youth Beat was created in the context of governmental priorities concerned with community safety and alcohol related antisocial behaviour. Funding was tied to targets and measurable outcomes, a trend which de St Croix (2017) argues marginalises youth work at a time when the service is already suffering from extensive spending cuts. In spite of these requirements youth workers made efforts to ensure traditional youth work values were prioritised in their practice, emphasising their desire to deliver an inclusive, holistic service centred around constructive, youth-led interventions. Yet they found social control to be an omnipotent presence. Presumptions about the target client group influenced both the youth worker's practice, and young people's reactions to it. Youth workers were deeply aware of the difficult, and at times, hostile relations young people had with the police. Maintaining positive relations with young people therefore required maintaining a strategic distance from what were seen to be the more punitive approaches of community safety professionals.

It could be argued that the dilemmas facing Youth Beat are no different than in youth work more generally. Youth workers are there to be young people's allies and advocates, but their role is also to facilitate young people's personal, social and educational development (National Youth Agency, 2006). An intrinsic part of that role is therefore to challenge, motivate and encourage young people. Phoning the police to deal with a potentially serious issue is therefore not against youth work principles. How youth workers manage such a process will demonstrate whether such principles are adhered to.

Over and above the normal challenges facing youth work, the project funding, monitoring and targeted approach did influence practice. The desire to ensure 'difference' from community safety professionals was exaggerated, and led to the adult-young person binary (Skott-Myhre, 2006) being amplified. There was also evidence of youth workers targeting those best fitting of the project objectives, thereby encouraging the 'selective problem construction' and 'deviancy amplification' highlighted by Squires (1997). But perhaps the strongest influence was the broader community safety and antisocial behaviour rhetoric. The Robbistoun neighbourhood itself was deemed to be 'risky' and

in need of intervention, a concern reflected in the raft of community safety measures visible across the area. The presence of a detached youth work project in itself provided a further layer of intervention, thereby contributing to young people's belief that their presence in public space was a problem. The 'unattached' young person – that is those not actively engaging in 'positive' activities – was identified as being that most in need of intervention.

Young people, it is important to emphasise, did enjoy the company of youth workers. For the most part their presence was respectful of young people's space, while being fun and educational. However, young people's reactions, particularly from those groups most marginalised, highlighted how conceptually community safety rhetoric has served to re-enforce an antisocial identity for young people and their neighbourhood. It is concluded that without the restrictions imposed by targeted funding a more radical form of youth work, unburdened by pre-identified groups, could deliver a programme of youth work that explores these issues with, and for, young people in ways and means of their choosing. Such a programme would be unhindered from assumptions about what constitutes a 'positive' activity and values young people's right to be unattached. It would also critically loosen the agenda of social control and its accompanied focus on 'vulnerable' youth, favouring instead a more inclusive and politicised form of youth work (Coussée et al., 2009).

For Cooper (2011), such a fundamental shift will afford youth workers the much needed space to imagine radical youth work possibilities and provide young people with opportunities to actively challenge the power structures and inequalities in their everyday lives. While questions of social control are likely to remain a tension, youth work would be uncoupled from a policy agenda dominated by the conceptualisation of youth as a problem and their diversion into 'positive activities'. This, in turn, will allow the empowering and emancipatory role of youth work to be recognised, explored and appropriately valued.

Ambitious statements are easy to write, but harder to deliver. Street-based youth work practice offers exciting possibilities for how community safety and youth justice can be delivered; an offer especially resonant in the Scottish political context where the value of youth work continues to be recognised strategically (see for example, Youth Link's National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19). However, austerity and a widening neo-liberal policy agenda from Westminster presents Scottish youth work and its workforce with deeper challenges. In England, ongoing cuts to local authority budgets have resulted in public spending on children and young people's services being distributed towards statutory areas that focus on safeguarding risk and on targeted interventions. This has resulted in a significant loss to 'open access' or universal youth services. Cuts to local government have not hit

Scotland with the same velocity (Davidson, 2019). However, McKinnon's (2019) Third Sector Forecast for Scotland found the majority of the Third Sector workforce reporting concerns over ongoing uncertainty in the political and financial climate, with youth work one of the key areas considered under pressure. It would seem that Scottish youth workers now, more than ever, need to work collectively to demonstrate that youth work is not simply there to 'plug the gaps' that the state can no longer provide. Rather, looking forward we must work together to defend and promote the benefits of providing a well-resourced, universal youth work across all parts of Scotland and the contribute such a service would make to tackling government objectives now and in the future.

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